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ABSTRACT

This report summarizes findings of a national survey of institutions of higher education (IHEs) with early childhood programs. The study, conducted by the National Council for Early Development and Learning, surveyed a nationally representative group of chairs/directors of early childhood teacher preparation programs of two- and four-year colleges and universities. The 438 IHEs participating in the survey were in 47 states plus Washington D.C., Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands. Major findings indicate that early childhood teacher education programs are in need of support. Overall, programs will not have adequate faculty to meet the projected workforce needs. The highest rated challenge of early childhood teacher education programs is difficulty attracting and retaining ethnically and linguistically diverse faculty. Early childhood teacher education programs have a smaller number of faculty serving a larger number of students than other programs in the same IHEs. Early childhood teacher education programs tend to have a greater percentage of part-time faculty members than do the institutions in which they reside. Gaps are evident in the programs with regard to their stated missions of preparing students to work with children with disabilities or with infants and toddlers, and the requirements of the program. Access to bachelor's degree programs upon completion of an associate's degree continues to be a problem because of articulation challenges. Other major challenges cited by IHEs include students' competing work or family-related responsibilities, and attracting and keeping students due to poor working conditions and wages in the field of early childhood. (KB)

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NCEDL Spotlights

No. 33 April - May 2001

Preparing the Workforce

This Spotlight is based on "Preparing the workforce: Early Childhood Teacher Preparation at 2- and 4-year institutions of higher learning," which is in press at *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*. The authors are Diane Early and Pamela Winton of NCEDL.

Early childhood teacher education programs need support

A national survey of institutions of higher education (IHEs) with early childhood programs indicates that these programs are in need of support. Overall, programs will not have adequate faculty to meet the projected workforce needs during this era of stronger teacher preparation requirements. In fact, using these data we estimate that a 76% increase in early childhood faculty would be needed if all current early childhood teachers were required to obtain a Bachelor's degree. Data also indicate that the faculty members of early childhood programs are working harder than their colleagues elsewhere in the same IHEs. They are serving more students with fewer full-time faculty members, compared to IHEs as a whole.

We found that there are many early childhood teacher preparation programs in the United States (over 1,200 nationwide or almost one-third of all IHEs). Less than half offer a Bachelor's degree, with most offering Associate's or less than Associate's degrees. This mirrors current early childhood personnel standards that typically do not require staff to have either a Bachelor's or an Associate's degree.

Implications for policy makers

- Resources must be earmarked to support the overall quality and accessibility of early childhood teacher education programs.
- Resources must be earmarked to address the lack of diversity in our early childhood faculty ranks.
- Attention must be paid to articulation or transfer-of-credit issues.
- Resources must address the poor working conditions and wages of the early childhood workforce, especially for teachers of infants, toddlers, and preschoolers.

Purpose, scope of study

- Better understanding the goals, capacity, supports, and challenges of the programs that train the early childhood workforce is essential as policymakers think about increasing pre-service and in-service requirements.
- NCEDL conducted a nationally representative survey of chairs/directors of early childhood teacher preparation programs at 2- and 4-year colleges and universities. The survey represents programs that prepare students to work with children any ages prior to kindergarten entry. The survey excluded programs that prepare students to work only with children in kindergarten or older.
- The 438 IHEs in the survey were in 47 states, plus Washington DC, Puerto Rico and the US Virgin Islands.

Faculty-related findings

Data show that the highest-rated challenge of early childhood programs is "difficulty attracting and retaining ethnically and linguistically diverse faculty." The challenges that face all of higher education of creating diverse faculties are present in early childhood teacher preparation programs. The fact that early childhood department chairs/directors report attracting and retaining ethnically and linguistically diverse faculty as their biggest challenge affirms their awareness of the problem.

Data comparing early childhood programs with the larger institutions in which they reside indicate that early childhood teacher preparation programs tend to have a small number of faculty who serve a larger number of students. The average student to full-time faculty ratio of 61 to 1 is 60% higher than the 39 to 1 ratio of the higher education institutions in which these programs reside. (*Continues on reverse)*

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Findings, *continues from front*

Furthermore, early childhood programs tend to have a greater percentage of part-time faculty members than do the institutions in which they reside. This is particularly true of early childhood programs at 2-year IHEs; they have less than half the number of full-time faculty and almost twice the number of part-time as compared with early childhood teacher preparation programs at 4-year IHEs.

The data indicate a gap between the stated mission of the programs and students' experiences in terms of preparing students to work with children with disabilities. For instance, almost 80% of Bachelor's programs indicate that preparing early interventionists is part of their mission; however, only 60% require one course or more addressing working with children with disabilities.

A similar gap exists with regard to preparing individuals to work with infants and toddlers. For instance, although 95% of the Associate's programs report that the age range covered by their program includes infants and toddlers, only 60% require a course or more on the topic, and only 63% require a practicum experience.

Survey data indicate that access to Bachelor's degree programs upon completion of an Associate's degree continues to be a problem because of articulation challenges. Articulation refers to the policies, guidelines, and practices that allow students to transfer credits earned in one university or college to another. Half of Associate's programs offer an Associate's in Applied Science (AAS), which is usually a terminal degree and not typically included in articulation agreements that guarantee a smooth transition of students from 2-year to 4-year programs.

This situation creates roadblocks for early childhood personnel graduating from AAS programs who want to pursue 4-year degrees. Because 4-year programs typically have some leeway in the policies and guidelines set by their universities about accepting credits, the motivation of faculty to address articulation problems is important. Our data indicate that faculty in 2-year programs are more aware of this challenge than are their colleagues in 4-year programs, suggesting that faculty awareness in 4-year programs may be a roadblock to making needed changes.

Other major challenges cited by IHEs include "students' competing work or family-related responsibilities" and "attracting and keeping students due to poor working conditions and wages in the field of early childhood."

Low salaries, lack of benefits, lack of a coordinated system of career paths, and few rewards for pursuing higher education are characteristics of careers in early childhood education so it is not surprising that attracting students is a challenge.

No matter how innovative our early childhood programs are, they will fail if we do not provide the infrastructure to support a well-educated and adequately compensated staff.

If you want to know more:

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